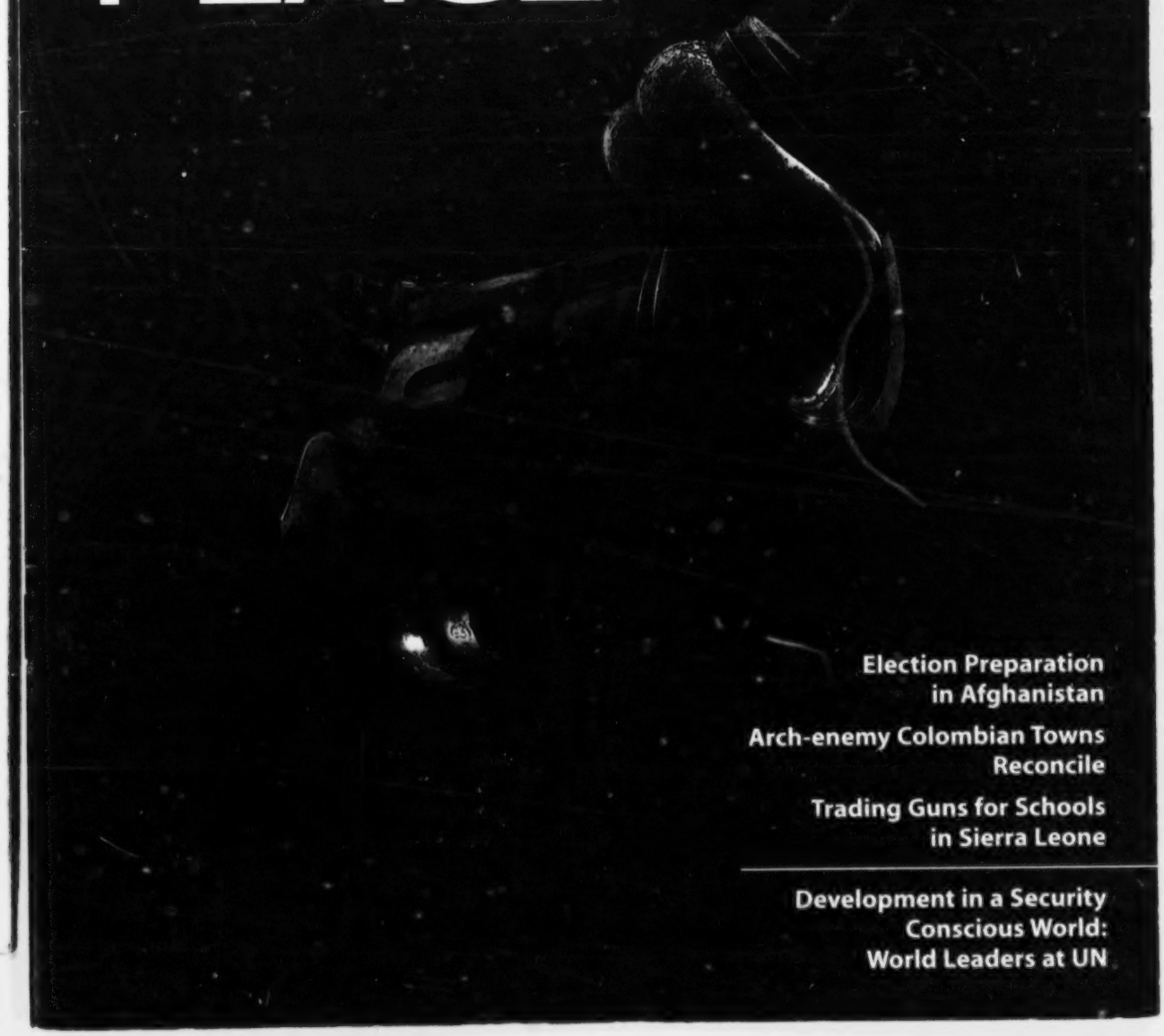
DECEMBER 2004

CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

UNDP

Winning the PEACE



Election Preparation in Afghanistan

Arch-enemy Colombian Towns Reconcile

Trading Guns for Schools in Sierra Leone

Development in a Security Conscious World: World Leaders at UN

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Road to Recovery

When I met Hamida Mohammed Ali in Kabul, Afghanistan in late 2001, a bomb targeting a Taliban stronghold had just destroyed her chicken coop, killing most of her 1,000 chickens.

It was a bleak picture. All around Kabul, villages lay abandoned and burnt-out tanks and other detritus of a quarter century of fighting lined the roads. Ruin and rubble were everywhere. But as I remember, Ms. Ali did not dwell on the misfortune that had visited her. Whereas a good many people might have been crushed by the events, she simply started to rebuild.

Photo: Dan Shepard/UNDP

That determination of the Afghanis to move forward has helped UNDP and UN efforts to rebuild the country, as it has in Angola, Guatemala, Mozambique, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. But it is not, and has never been, an easy road to recovery. From forging a peace agreement to keeping the peace, from disarming militias to restoring justice, rebuilding institutions, and providing people with the means to reconstruct their lives, the success of this process is vital not only for the people directly affected by the conflict, but for the peace and stability of countries, regions and the world.

In this issue of CHOICES, we revisit countries that had been ravaged by conflict during the last decade. While peace has returned to several, others are still plagued by festering violence, if not open warfare. Yet among the people we visited in villages across these countries, we found a yearning for something better. We found Afghanis who made it their business to defy threats of violence in order to register to vote. We found two Colombian towns, at war with each other for years, who are now cooperating with each other; Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi collaborating to produce food; Bosnians rebuilding their lives in Srebrenica, the site of the worst massacre of that war; and Somali youth who are trading their guns for job skills.

Also in this issue, CHOICES looks at one of the best and most positive means to focus attention on issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and development: sports. People pay attention to sports, as the Athens Olympics of last August demonstrated. Sports, with its own universal language, transcends borders and disputes. And sports promot health and physical fitness, self-esteem and confidence.

But the problem with sports is that there is not enough it. The challenge now is to ensure that the benefits of sports c be enjoyed by people everywhere, even in the poorest countri

This, the last issue of 2004, will also be my last edition as Editor-in-Chief of CHOICES. After almost 10 years UNDP, I have been appointed as the Director of the new established New York Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, where I intend to actively engage the entire UN system in furthering sports as a vehicle toward progress.

In my time advising on CHOICES, we have worked ha to reflect the idea that development is not a cold institutional process, but about people. The magazine, written b journalists, goes beyond anything found in the mainstrea media and has helped promote dialogue about developme from people at the community level to heads of state. I ha always felt that CHOICES is singularly the best publication that demonstrated how development works—what it can accomplish and how it helps change the lives of peopl for the better. I am determined to continue to support the work of CHOICES, and UNDP, in my new endeavour.

Contact information: Djibril Diallo, Director, UN Offi of Sport for Development and Peace, Chrysler Building, 4th Floor, 405 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10174.

Djibril Diallo

Cover: Sculpture "Non-Violence," by Karl Fredrik Reutersward, stands outside the Visitors' Entrance to the United Nations. Photo by Dan Shepard/UNDP

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Editor-in-Chief
Djibril Diallo

Editor
Daniel Shepard

Managing Editor
Rajeswary Iruthayanathan

Design
Ferro+Ferro Graphic Communication
Arlington, Virginia

Production Manager
Maureen Lynch

Editorial/Production Associate
Jennifer Prince

CHOICES Online
Milagros Feliciano

Distribution
Shamsuz Zaman

Special Adviser to the Editor-in-Chief
Nadine Gordimer

Advisers
Dianne Abbott
Mervin Aubespin
Sandy Close
Inge Kaul
Geoffrey Lean

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One United Nations Plaza
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Tel: (1-212) 906 5325
Fax: (1-212) 906 5364
E-mail: choices@undp.org

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Coming in March

Microfinance has emerged over the last decade as a significant tool in the fight against poverty. In the March issue, CHOICES looks at microfinance, its successes and failures, and its future in development.

Visit CHOICES Online: www.choices.undp.org

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Few African Countries on Track to Meet MDGs

African countries have made major strides toward improving their economic fundamentals, according to a new report by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, but still, growth rates are not sufficient to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Real GDP growth in 2003 climbed to 3.8 percent, up from 3.2 percent in 2002. But in 2003, only five countries—Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Mozambique—achieved the seven percent growth necessary to reach the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015. Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Tunisia were cited as Africa's most competitive nations.

Trade liberalization alone will not boost growth and poverty reduction in Africa, according to the Economic Report on Africa 2004, which argues that a comprehensive approach to development that prioritizes poverty alleviation is needed. It suggests that successful integration of Africa into the world economy will require better-educated and healthier workforces, improved economic and political governance, and better-quality infrastructure.

Action against Hunger and Poverty

A new initiative to raise at least US$50 billion a year to fight hunger and poverty was launched by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, with the support of the presidents of Chile, France and Spain, at the start of this year's UN General Assembly session.

The initiative calls for new mechanisms—mandatory and voluntary—that would be channeled through existing bilateral and multilateral agencies. The mechanisms include a highly controversial proposal for a tax on international financial transactions.

"I believe the issue of hunger has become a political problem," President Lula said. "It is a priority, and here on out, it will be discussed more prominently." The initiative is not a repeat of past discussions, he said, with developing countries demanding things from rich countries.

"Now each one of us will be taking on new responsibilities," he said. For taxpayers in both rich and poor countries, he said, "there will be a clear understanding of where the money goes. Poor countries must do their part to demand fairer policies from rich countries."

French President Jacques Chirac called the initiative "unprecedented." The fact that the initiative has been endorsed by 110 countries, he said, "now shows that this action against poverty is an inevitability."

Photo: UN/DPI

Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Chilean President Ricardo Lagos Escobar, French President Jacques Chirac and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the launch of "Action Against Hunger and Poverty," an anti-poverty initiative endorsed by 110 countries.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan meeting with community leaders in Darfur, Sudan.

Relief Efforts in Darfur

Current violence against civilians in the Darfur region of Sudan has forced about 1.45 million Sudanese to become internally displaced persons and another 200,000 to live as refugees in neighbouring Chad. The World Food Programme reported that it fed more than 1.3 million people in September, the most it has been able to reach since the humanitarian crisis there began last year.

Jan Pronk, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's envoy to the region, reported that Sudan had not made progress in either stopping militia attacks against civilians in Darfur, disarming those armed groups or prosecuting the individuals responsible for the worst atrocities.

Aiming for 0.7

Spain is working to increase its official development assistance toward the goal of 0.7 percent of GDP, according to Spain's Prime Minister José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

Prime Minister Zapatero, at the UN, said his government intended to raise its contribution to ODA from 0.3 percent to 0.5 percent over the next three years. He also said that Spain plans to cancel an increasing amount of debt owed by developing countries.

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said that the UK, which has doubled its ODA since 1997, would continue to work toward the goal of meeting the UN target of 0.7 percent of its GDP for official development assistance within the next 10 years. He announced that his country is presently increasing its funding for UNDP by 50 percent.

French President Jacques Chirac announced that France will increase its ODA to 0.5 percent by 2007 with a view to 0.7 percent by 2012. "We need to find at least an additional US$50 billion per year between now and 2015 if we are to hope to succeed," Mr. Chirac said.

Russia Endorses Kyoto Climate Change Treaty

Russia announced that it would ratify the Kyoto Treaty on Climate Change, which will move the treaty one step closer to enforcement. The treaty calls on countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions—which are blamed for accelerating climate change—to 1990 levels. To enter into force 55 Parties to the Convention must ratify the Protocol, including developed countries whose combined 1990 emissions of carbon dioxide exceed 55 percent of that group's total. Russia, with 17 percent of the emissions, would push the amount beyond the threshold, according to the Convention's secretariat.

Nobel Peace Prize for Kenyan Environmental Activist Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai, the founder and leader of the Green Belt Movement, has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Ms. Maathai's organization has worked to empower women, improve the environment and fight corruption in Africa for almost 30 years. Starting by responding to a wood fuel crisis during the 1980s, Ms. Maathai led a movement that has planted close to 30 million trees across Kenya. Now Kenya's deputy environment minister, Ms. Maathai is the first African woman to win the prize.

Carrefour in Partnership with UNDP

The Carrefour Group, Europe's top retailer with over 10,000 supermarket and discount stores in 29 countries, has joined with UNDP to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. To date, the Carrefour Foundation has provided over $340,000 to UNDP projects in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Malaysia.

Carrefour's International Foundation, which established a partnership with UNDP in 2001 through the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty, has provided nearly $500,000 in support of WACAP initiatives. In Malaysia, 150 low-income, vulnerable women from the Kuala Lumpur area are benefiting from a year-long professional training programme in basic business administration skills and $40,000 worth of micro-credit grants were awarded to the women so they could set up their own businesses.

In Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Foundation's support has improved access to safe water to over 50,000 individuals living in local communities and refugee camps in high drought areas. The UNDP-managed project constructs wells and reservoirs, provides water treatment and trains community members to manage their own water supplies.

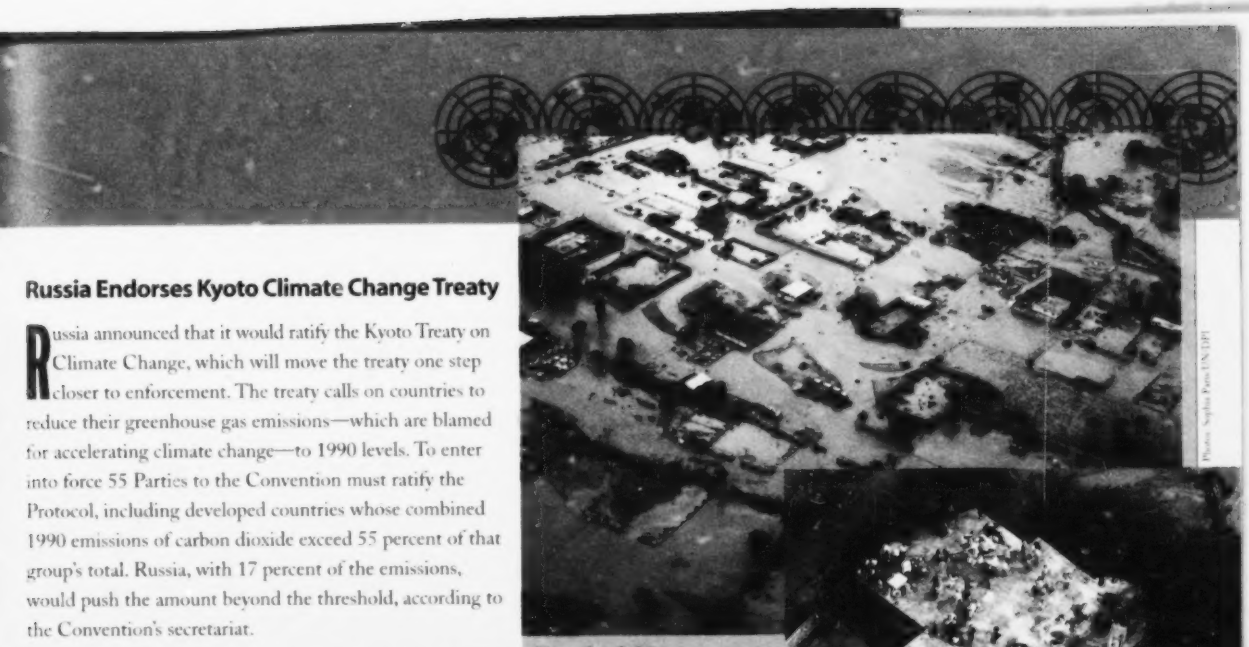


Photo: Sophia Paris/UNDP

Tropical Storm Devastates Haiti

More than 1,500 people were killed and some 300,000 people were affected when floods caused by Hurricane Ivan and Tropical Storm Jeanne submerged much of Haiti's north, including more than 80 percent of the city of Gonaïves. Relief operations were complicated by a difficult security situation. The disastrous impact of the storms have been blamed on severe environmental degradation, including deforestation, that has led to an increased frequency of landslides and floods.

Photo: Rebeca Arno/UNDP Grenada

Hurricane Flattens Grenada

Hurricane Ivan's Category-3 winds killed 34 people on the Caribbean island of Grenada and destroyed nine out of 10 homes in the country. More than 110,000 people were left homeless by the storm, including Grenada's Prime Minister. The island's economy was left in shambles, with its famed nutmeg and cacao groves wiped out. Preliminary damage estimates run in excess of $100 million.

NGOs Mobilize for MDGs

More than 1,800 representatives from 750 non-governmental organizations associated with the UN gathered at UN Headquarters shortly before the start of the General Assembly session to mobilize for broader public support of the Millennium Development Goals.

"This Conference aims to raise public awareness and support for the Millennium Development Goals through the 3,000 NGOs working directly with the UN Secretariat," said Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of the United Nations. "The involvement of civil society partners in the MDG Campaign is essential to its success."

MARK MALLOCH BROWN

THE UNDP OUTLOOK

Winning the Peace: Time is of the Essence

As often as the international community has been called in to respond to conflict situations over the last decade, the response to emergency situations is still far from optimal. International post conflict assistance has often been too little, too late, with difficulties in mobilizing resources and assembling the expertise constantly preventing the kind of timely action that could keep a country from sliding back into renewed conflict.

Time is of the essence in responding to post conflict situations. Winning the peace is more than just ending the war. Even during the delicate moments following a cease fire, planning and action for long-term development needs to get underway. Old, outdated sequential thinking about responding to emergency conflict situations—the assembly line approach of first peacekeeping, then humanitarian relief operations, followed by development—must give way to a totally new type of recovery planning that allows future needs to be considered early on.

UNDP Administrator in Kabul, Afghanistan, shortly after the fall of the Taliban.

To be effective, donor funding has to be available at the earliest possible time. Waiting for a funding conference months down the road is to invite temporary peace accords to unravel. And the development community itself has to respond with a greater sense of urgency. It cannot wait for the bureaucracies to rev up their mechanisms—which now typically take more than six months—for an early response. The penalty for a delayed response, too often, is a renewal of hostilities, and worse, it often causes the conflict to spread.

Security cannot wait. Clearly, people need food and shelter in the immediate aftermath of a conflict. But while peacekeepers are necessary to maintain big-picture military security issues, people want, and require, immediate short-term personal security. They need the assurance that it is safe for them to plant a crop, invest in a business, and even send their children to school. Without security, there is little hope that the peace will keep.

But security needs new institutions. It depends on good governance that is fair and transparent and relies on the rule of law. It requires a properly trained police force, honest judges and an adequate prison system. And it demands that landmines are removed immediately. Because these institutions cannot be built overnight, planning for them must start at the earliest.

Winning the peace also means providing basic services. People need jobs right away. Demobilized ex-combatants must find alternative livelihoods in an economy that offers new opportunities. Without a chance to make a living, the odds of renewed instability are enormously enhanced. We have learned this from experience.

Planning must start quickly, even on the issues that cannot be rushed, such as democracy, justice and reconciliation. While there is the need over time to try and shift the competition in different groups in a society from an armed competition to a peaceful and democratic one at the ballot box, this shift can indeed drive parties further apart if the process fails to address the underlying causes of conflict.

Democracy has to be well established, and there must be a feeling that the ghosts of the past can be revisited without risk before these issues are tackled. But while the reconciliation process is inevitable, it should probably not happen at the beginning of the process, but rather, as an inevitable step on the road to a real healing.

Through the epidemic of conflicts that swept the globe during the 1990s, the UN system and UNDP have learned from the trials of peacebuilding efforts. UNDP teams have helped formulate and implement early recovery frameworks and programmes worldwide, including among other places, Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eritrea, the Great Lakes region of Africa and Sri Lanka. There are countries now at the precipice, where they can either follow a road to recovery or descend into a spiral of further violence and conflict.

UNDP has already started to revamp the way it approaches post conflict emergency situations starting with the creation of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. But we, along with the rest of the international community, still need to do more. We must fully integrate development needs into the post-conflict response and use our resources more strategically. We need to mobilize while a conflict is still in the news and we need to make sure that the road to recovery is strategically mapped out well before the conflict is replaced in the headlines by tomorrow's crises. ■

Mark Malloch Brown is the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

SREBRENICA Revisited:

Site of Worst Massacre in Bosnian War Rebuilds

Devastated region remains poorest in the country

Photo: Alban Sabbri/UNDP

Muhamed Bektic returned to Srebenica with his wife and two daughters after the war and are now raising cows.

Below: Picturesque from above, Srebrencia is now the country's poorest region.

BY BETH KAMPSCHROR

Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Just a few miles down a winding road from one of the most horrific scenes of Bosnia's 1992-1995 war, Safeta Beganovic walks carefully among 6,000 fluffy yellow chicks in an expanded poultry-raising shed, making sure the scratching birds are fed and watered.

"We had a small building in 2001, but to really make it work you need to produce greater quantities," she says. Through a UNDP programme that is helping people in the region get back on their feet, Ms. Beganovic and her sister, Ifeta Mejrimic, were able to obtain a 10,000-KM micro-grant that has helped them expand. "It was the icing on the cake," says Ms. Beganovic.

Ms. Beganovic lives with her 14-year-old son and her sister near Konjevic Polje, a quiet area of green foothills and scattered hardwood trees, save for the occasional car driving past and the chickens twittering in the shed.

But also scattered throughout the bucolic countryside are houses pocked with bullet holes and abandoned, roofless buildings scarred with scorch marks. Bold graffiti splashed on the town's tiny market reads "Noz, zica, Srebrenica"—literally, "Knife, wire, Srebrenica," and the word *noz*, or knife, in this case has connotations of slaughter. Ms. Beganovic survived the grim events of summer 1995; her husband did not.

The 1995 massacre

"My husband disappeared in the fall of Srebrenica and I haven't heard anything since," she says, referring to the several days in July 1995 when Bosnian Serb forces overran what had been a UN-declared "safe area" and executed some 8,000 Muslim men and boys. Ms. Beganovic, her then-toddling son, and her sister fled to Tuzla. Five years later, they were some of the first refugees to return to the

The Srebrencia Regional Recovery Programme's business extension centre provides a wide range of services to community members to help them plan, register and start small businesses.

war-ravaged area, which is still in Serb hands after the peace agreement that ended the war in late 1995.

The massacre made Srebrenica a symbol of Bosnia's tragic war and since the war, Srebrenica has earned the dubious distinction of being post-war Bosnia's poorest region. The factories that offered employment before 1992 are now in ruins and Srebrenica missed out on millions of dollars in reconstruction aid that poured into Bosnia after the war ended because of the local Serb authorities' refusal to allow refugees to return to the area until 1999.

Safeta Beganovic, who fled Srebrencia during the war, has returned to raise chickens.

As a result of the tense situation and the lack of jobs, only about 6,000 Muslims of the 57,000 who lived here before the war had returned to the three municipalities.

In response to this situation, UNDP, with support from the government, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Japan, Norway and United Kingdom, unveiled a three-year, US$12.5 million Srebrenica Regional Recovery Programme in 2002 to help people who want to return here become small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs. But with the industrial base of the region in shambles, UNDP aims to make agriculture the primary source of income in this mountainous, rural area. Agriculture, once a secondary source of income, accounted for just nine percent of Bosnia's pre-war GDP, but now it makes up some 16 percent.

Competition for grants

Competition for the Programme's micro-grants was stiff, with 1,642 people applying for 170 grants. The winning proposals ranged from raising chickens, sheep and livestock to farming, wood-cutting and bakery-building. Now, two years later, about 2,000 people are benefiting from the project.

"One of the lessons learned is that we need to concentrate on one sector of the economy. Agriculture did well," says project manager Alexandre Prieto in his office in Srebrenica, across the street from a crumbling and abandoned former department store. Its boarded-up windows face the hamlet's main two-lane road, which is cratered with potholes. Outside town, cows and stray dogs lope down roads to outlying villages that are often without running water.

UNDP has also helped to repair roads and build water works in three municipalities—Srebrenica, Bratunac and Milici—and is helping with municipal budgets for 2005. UNDP is also assisting a television station from nearby Tuzla to obtain a transmitter so that Srebrenica can get a signal. And by analyzing interviews with female heads of households, UNDP is building a database, to better understand the women's problems and see possibilities of economic development.

"Nobody did this before," Mr. Prieto says. "There was not an in-depth analysis of what's going on here. We have the capacity in this office to do these types of things."

Nothing can make up for massacre

No one says that this project can make up for the massacre. But officials do say that it shows that the international community, which was largely regarded as ineffective during the Bosnian war, is committed to helping people make a living here almost 10 years after the tragedy.

"That was the major, fundamental, cardinal reason why UNDP decided to go ahead with the project," says UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Bosnia Moises Venancio. "We certainly felt that given the suffering here, that we had to be committed to it, to help those people

Right: Crumbling and abandoned department store in Srebrencia. Virtually all industry that existed before the war has disappeared.

Poverty is widespread in the region, and when Elvis Lemes returned with his sickly brother, he depended on help from neighbours to get settled.

who live here and those who want to come back."

Though the project does aid returning women left husbandless by the 1995 massacre, Mr. Prieto says that the beneficiary ratio is about 52 percent Muslim returnees and 48 percent Bosnian Serbs.

"In terms of reconciliation, it's important to have a balance. You can't just focus on returnees because some of them haven't built sufficient conditions to receive a grant from us," he says, pointing out that people whose houses are destroyed should be approaching humanitarian organizations to receive house and infrastructure materials.

One Serb woman who has benefited from the programme is Jagoda Sekulic, who lives with her husband just up the hill from the town of Milici, in a neighbourhood of half-finished orange brick houses.

Ms. Sekulic used her micro-grant for an enormous 100-year-old machine that spins loose wool into bales. In the winter months her basement becomes a small-scale wool factory, with a din of whirring machinery that sends wool bits floating through the air.

"Yes, it's dirty," she says of the work, "But it's clean. I wanted to do something at home, and I thought about what I wanted to do. It stunned me that wool was just being thrown out."

She employs several other women as needed, and says they spun about 250 kilos of wool last year. To prepare for this year's season she has bought nine tonnes of wool to spin. Other women working there knit thick, colourful sweaters to sell for about $20.

"I was satisfied last year, and if everything goes well this year, I'll buy a car because without a car you can't do anything here," she says.

Up a winding two-track gravel road in the mountain village of Suceska, are two micro-grant beneficiaries who are anomalies in the area. While most returning refugees in Bosnia are elderly people who have nowhere else to go, Muhamed Bektic, 32, came back with his wife and two young daughters. He and his brother are raising cows in their new tiled-roofed barn.

"UNDP helped us," he says. "And if we find at least 50 percent more—either through other credits or donations—we can expand."

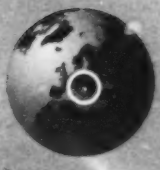
Still a precarious existence

Back in Srebrenica, Alexandre Prieto says the projects do need more investment to really get off the ground. Beneficiaries that received pregnant heifers did so on condition that they sell milk or cheese—but there are no dairies coming to buy the milk and no collection centres. The programme has prepared a proposal for these but needs to find a donor. With more investment, Jagoda Sekulic could expand into spinning yarn. And more area chicken processors would mean better prices for Safeta Beganovic and her sister, who currently sell to one processor at fixed prices.

Ms. Beganovic says that is a problem, as the closure of the one processor would not only mean the end of her business, but the end of work for some 150 other producers that sell to the processor. ■

Beth Kampschror is a freelance journalist based in Sarajevo who has written for the Christian Science Monitor, The Wall Street Journal, *and has co-authored the book "Decade of Dayton" on NATO peacekeepers in Bosnia.*

Jagoda Sekulic, above with her 100-year-old machine that spins local wool into bales. Right, holding one of her thick, colourful sweaters.



Bosnia and Herzegovina

AT A GLANCE

Population: 4.1 million

Area: 51,129 sq km

Human Development Ranking: 66 of 177 countries

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: 0.1

Public expenditure on education as % of GDP: n/a

Public expenditure on health as % of GDP: 2.8

Military expenditure as % of GDP: n/a

GDP per capita: $5,970

Source: *Human Development Report 2004*

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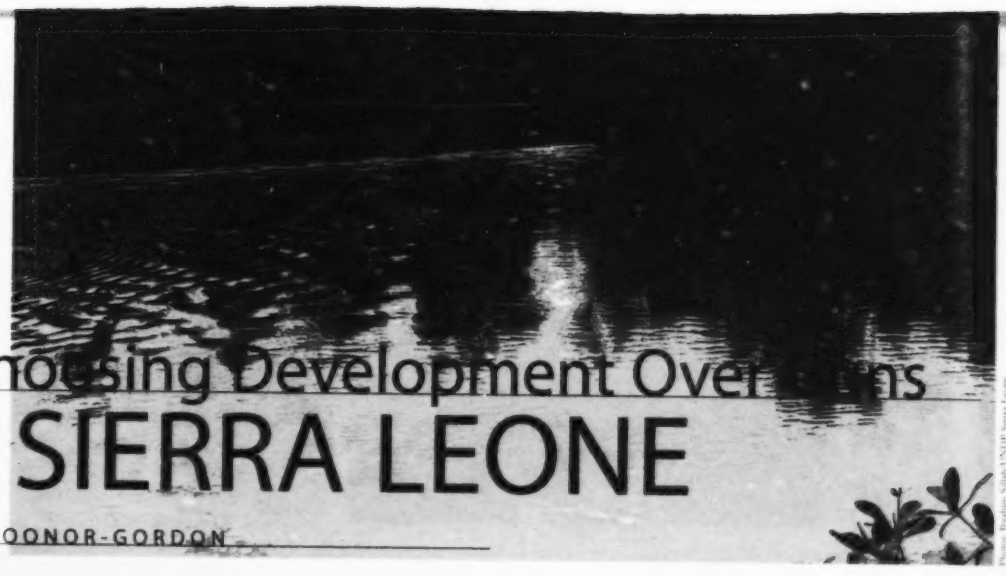


Choosing Development Over Guns in SIERRA LEONE

BY OLU AWOONOR-GORDON

Villages hit hard by war look to overcome culture of guns

MAKALI, SIERRA LEONE

Ever since the railroad line to Makali was abandoned, there have been no roads leading into the village. Yet with access only from the river, the rebel Revolutionary United Front used the surrounding area in Sierra Leone's Ribbi Chiefdom in southern Moyamba district during the war years of the 1990s as a staging ground to launch attacks on the country's capital, Freetown.

The war may be officially over now, but Sierra Leone is still awash in guns and weaponry. For the people of the region, who are still coming to terms with the bitter memories of the conflict, life is returning to normal. For Saidu Conteh, nine years old, that means he will actually be able to attend school.

Children in front of house burned down by rebels during Sierra Leone's six-year civil war.

Right: Chiefdom Speaker Albert Brima Charllie, and David P. Amara, now a secondary school principal, were commanders with the Civil Defense Forces during the war and were instrumental in persuading ex-combatants to give up their weapons.

"He's never had the opportunity to go to school on a regular basis," says his mother, Fatmata Bangura. "The rebels didn't allow children to pursue a normal life—all they said was that they must fight for the Revolution to triumph and that after that everything would be better."

Ms. Bangura explains that when the rebel RUF established a regional military headquarters at an old oil-palm plantation at Mabang, only a few miles away from her home in Rotifunk town, she was forced to take to the bush, like hundreds of other villagers, to avoid losing her son to forced conscription into the RUF ranks. She still has no idea where Saidu's father is—they were separated during the war.

Overcoming a gun culture

As a major battleground in the conflict for at least six years, a culture of gun-ownership, especially among young people and juveniles, has permeated Ribbi chiefdom. Many of the soldiers were children, press-ganged into serving as child-soldiers as part of the RUF's infamous 'Small Boys Units,' they were given hard drugs and forced to commit horrendous atrocities. There was no schooling of any kind during the war-years in the Moyamba District in southern Sierra Leone.

"Although the demobilization and disarmament process, organized by the government and UN peacekeepers, took over 30,000 weapons away from ex-combatants of all factions and organized their re-training and community reintegration, there were many small arms still floating around in the various communities," says Ibrahim Sillah, a community development assistant for UNDP's Arms for Development initiative that is encouraging villagers to turn in their weapons in return for development assistance.

"Because of the experience here as a major theatre of war, it's very important that we succeed here," says Hulaimatu Kallon, a community facilitator for the UN mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL. The biggest challenge, she says, is changing the pervasive gun culture of the region. "We are trying to replace this attitude with a participatory approach to local development," says Ms. Kallon.

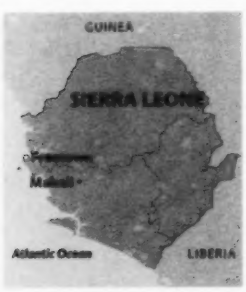
In Bradford, home of the Chiefdom's headquarters, Chernor Jalloh, a volunteer with the small arms collection initiative, said most local people were happy to surrender their guns. "The Arms for Development initiative convinced us that the ownership of guns cannot co-exist with development," says the 48-year-old farmer.

Initially, however, many people in Ribbi refused to co-operate with the initiative, including ex-combatants on both sides of the fighting, from the RUF and from the Civil Defense Forces. The Chiefdom Speaker finally had the idea to ask former commanders for help in convincing their former subordinates to participate. After explaining

the initiative and its benefits, several former commanders decided to join and succeeded in persuading a significant number of former soldiers to turn in their weapons.

Most villagers ultimately participated in the arms-surrender exercise. Weapons—ranging from old hunting guns to sub-automatic AK-47s and unexploded ordnances—were collected. The chiefdom was awarded an arms-free certification status in March this year. "It was a big ceremony and the entire community, the district officer and local police unit commander were all in attendance," says Mr. Jalloh.

Since the chiefdom has been declared arms-free, investors are more interested in the area. One company is currently restarting production in the old palm oil plantation and community members think that the improved safety of their chiefdom will bring more investments, both national and international.



The people decide

"The communities themselves have ownership of the programme," explains Mr. Sillah, who added that after the guns were collected, the community was consulted on how to spend the US$20,000 development package allocated by UNDP to the chiefdom.

"They, themselves, decided that they needed a health centre in Rokolo village that will serve almost 1,000 people, a three classroom primary school at Makali and another school at Mokorbu."

Joseph Rogers is headmaster of the Evangelical Model Primary school in Makali, which serves 239 children in this remote village. The thatched roof building was in terrible condition and Mr. Rogers said that since the rains began, classes had to be held on the verandas of private houses. "Since the community now knows we'll be having a modern structure, school enrolment has increased," Mr. Rogers says.

For Ms. Bangura, the new school in Makali means that her son will now be able to concentrate on learning. "The old school was very inconvenient. When the rains fell and the wind blew, it was almost impossible to study. And the bamboo tables and chairs were not enough to accommodate all the children," she explained in Krio, Sierra Leone's *lingua franca*.

While pleased that the Arms for Development initiative resulted in a new school, Mr. Rogers had one lament. "Since we've surrendered our hunting guns there's been a serious shortage of bush-meat."

Bush-meat—squirrels, deer and monkeys—spice up the local farmers' diet. Mr Rogers said that the monkeys, in particular, were getting quite cheeky since the hunters laid down their guns. But he accepted that overall, it was worth foregoing this culinary delight for the benefits which the village school expects to get that will also serve surrounding villages.

One company is currently starting production at the old palm oil plantation, which will improve the local economy.

Pa Santingie Kanu, town chief of Makali handed over his ancient hunting gun—a legacy from his father. "I feel good about it, although we don't get much forest game now, because at least the children will see peace and progress."

To replace the gun-hunted game, UNDP has supplied wire-traps to snare game, but most villagers say that trapping is not as efficient as hunting with guns.

Pa Santingie Kanu's old hunting gun may be given back to him—"but only after the government legislates a new form of licensing—involving communities themselves," says Mr. Sillah. He adds that it is very important for local people and authorities to recommend and approve the licensing of legitimate weapons. "They know their own people and who owns a gun for justifiable and legal purposes."

Since it began in November 2002, the Arms for Development initiative has spread to nine chiefdoms in all parts of Sierra Leone. At least 10 more communities will be targeted by the end of 2004. ■

Olu Awoonor-Gordon is an editor for Peep! Magazine, *a current affairs magazine in Freetown, Sierra Leone.*

AT A GLANCE

Population: 5.8 million

Area: 71,740 sq km

Human Development Ranking: 177 of 177 countries

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: n/a

Public expenditure on education as % of GDP: n/a

Public expenditure on health as % of GDP: 2.6

Military expenditure as % of GDP: 2.2

GDP per capita: $520

Source: Human Development Report 2004

Jobs are scarce and poverty is widespread in the region and in settlements along the road to Makali.

Winning the PEACE

Young Militia Fighters in SOMALIA Trade Guns for Job Skills

BY OMAR ADEN QADI

Destroying a working weapon is a prerequisite for programme

Mogadishu, Somalia

There are tens of thousands of mostly young fighters armed to the teeth in this country, but Abdullahi Omar Adawe is no longer one of them.

Mr. Adawe, a former militia member, is now working in a welding plant. Along with 150 former militia members, he gave up his gun in exchange for learning new skills, and a job.

Photo: Omar Aden Qadi/UNDP

Right: Programme required registrants to turn in and destroy a working gun.

Below: Programme participant with weapon to be destroyed.

Demobilizing 150 Somali militia members may be just a drop in the ocean, but the demobilization programme, funded by UNDP and implemented by SAACID, a local NGO, has taken on a far greater symbolic significance. After eight months of training, none of the militia members who completed the programme took up guns again, all acquired skills and many of them ended up getting jobs. The result has created a sense of hope and confidence in a nation immersed in a period of total despair and depression.

Somalia, which has not had a central government for the last 12 years, is facing an uphill struggle to demobilize and disarm its militias that are armed with sophisticated tanks, APCs, mortars, and anti-aircraft missiles.

Guns in exchange for skills

To join the programme, all participants had to hand in a working gun, and all had to destroy their gun in front of SAACID staff.

But still, the first few weeks of the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Programme were rough, according to SAACID Director Raho Jiniqow, who says the militias were "unmanageable, uncooperative and stubborn."

"We discovered that some of them had pistols inside the class. Many of them would not come in the morning. Most of those who attended would want to leave after about two hours, and getting their attention could not be achieved by any means," she says.

Alarmed by the difficult, if not hostile, behaviour of many militia members, as well as their exceptional sense of denial when they made mistakes, SAACID decided to be stricter and impose penalties on the bad behaviour cases, while still providing counseling and showing care, attention and understanding. The penalties ranged from deductions from their US$30 monthly allowance to expulsion from the training. No one was expelled, but there was one dropout, one student who was killed outside the training and one who discontinued it as a result of an injury he sustained in the city.

The stick and carrot policy worked well, according to Ahmed Ali Mohamed, Field Officer of SAACID, and everybody "learned to be more responsible and more disciplined."

In addition to the 150 militia members, there were also another 150 non-militia young people, half of them women. According to Kheyrto Mohamed Awale, who participated in the programme, she did not like the idea of mixing with the "dangerous people" at first. But after two weeks, she says "I accepted them as normal people whom I can share many things with."

Due to a tight budget, SAACID was unable to conduct a formal follow-up after the programme was finished. But Ms. Jiniqow says that immediately after the completion of the programme, "we understand that nearly 80 of the trainees found jobs, many of them with the companies that we sent them to for work placement during the training."

Companies hesitate before hiring ex-militiamen

Adale Welding is a small but growing local company whose owner reluctantly trained three of the demobilization programmes' militia students. Abdullahi Duqow, the owner, says the company's reservations over accepting the trainees is a measure of how the nation dreads these young armed men. But, Mr. Duqow says, the irony is that all three of the former militia members ended up not only as permanent employees, but also as "the most valued workmen in the company."

Mr. Duqow, who waxes philosophical as he runs his company that produces and repairs beds, windows and doors, adds, "It is probably a combination of many factors that has helped them to be the best. Maybe they were subjected to disdain and contempt for a long time and they were desperate to prove themselves. Maybe the literacy, numeracy and civic education classes have given them an edge to work better and learn better than the rest of my employees. And maybe they want to escape once and for all the vicious cycle of the militia life and value their skills more than the normal people."

Mr. Adawe, 21, the ex-militia member, says he now makes the equivalent of $40 a month working for Adale Welding, plus incentives when the work is good. "I believe the demobilization programme was a God-sent gift. I am now a skilled man who can support himself and his family. I was saved from a dangerous life. I was different; I am now a normal man. There is nothing better I could get from life. Thank God."

However, Sahra Mohamed Haji, 18, who was trained as a tailor is not as lucky as Mr. Adawe. She never got any job since the training ended in April 2004 and she blames two factors for her unemployment. The course was too short to give her good skills, she says, and there is not much market demand for sewing skills.

But while other trainees agree that the skills training course was too short, many say that jobs are out there. Some students who trained as tailors have gotten jobs. Shamso Ibrahim Sheikh bought herself a sewing machine by saving the $30 a month she received from the programme and today she is self employed, working at home and making up to $20 a month.

Other trainees learned skills as electricians, carpenters, nursing, secretarial jobs, fisheries, motor winding and auto mechanics.

Hospital welcomes former fighters

Medina Hospital, the only public hospital in Mogadishu that survived the civil war, welcomed the former militiamen without hesitation, accepting 16 for work placement. Caring for the wounded from the war for many years, the hospital has often treated the wounded of both sides of the fighting.

"We have met these militias in every other setting before, so we were glad to jump at the opportunity of training them when SAACID contacted us," says Dr. Hassan Osman Essa, one of the most senior doctors in Medina Hospital.

The hospital gave the trainees first aid lessons and, under strict monitoring, let them give some medications, prescribed by doctors. The hospital has plans to employ some of the trained militia members.

Yonis Ali Qabobe, 20, says he was literally shaking with delight when he was selected to work in the hospital. "This is what I always wanted, I will work hard and would become a full nurse quickly. I will help the people, the patients and the doctors and nurses," says Mr. Qabobe. ■

Omar Aden Qadi is a Somali journalist working for Mogadishu University's Faculty of Journalism as a lecturer.

AT A GLANCE

Population: 9.1 million

Area: 637,657 sq km

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: 1

Life expectancy at birth: 47.71 years

Adult literacy rate: 17%

Military expenditure as % of GDP: 0.9

GDP per capita: $500.00

Source: Human Development Report 2004

Above: Destroyed weapons.

Left: Programme Director Raho Jiniqow, centre, says initial hostile behaviour by ex-militia members gave way to better discipline.

Winning the PEACE

Tale of Two Towns in COLOMBIA:

Bloody Political Conflict Yields to Joint Development

An experiment in peace in the midst of war

Students participating in a recycling programme, a programme that would have been impossible at the height of political violence between the towns of El Dorado and El Castillo.

Photo: Sergio Ocampo/UNDP

BY SERGIO OCAMPO

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

Around 200 dead, over 500 orphaned children, 20 lost years and a generation that has grown up in the shadow of fear and violence. This sad inventory came to light when, on 28 June 1998, a little shamefaced but nonetheless full of hope, the leaders of El Dorado and El Castillo, two tiny towns in central Colombia, signed a peace agreement to end a bloody conflict that had raged between their communities for over 15 years.

Although only 23 kilometres of rough road lies between the two towns, located in an area where the foothills of the Andes gradually flatten out to become the wide savannah of eastern Colombia, the two communities were irreparably separated by politics.

The conflict that enveloped the two towns—El Dorado, a deeply conservative community of 4, 000 people was pitted against El Castillo, which has 8, 000 people and a bulwark of Communism—was a microcosm of the larger-scale violence that has gripped the country for 30 years.

According to José Luis Bociga a leading expert on the conflict, a few years of skirmishes that resulted in minor injuries led to increased tension that spilled over in 1986, when the Unión Patriótica the political wing of FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, began to mobilize in strongholds such as El Castillo. Soon after, El Dorado conservative leader Elías Díaz was assassinated, followed by the killing of three other community leaders within a month. With the escalation in violence, El Dorado organized its own local self-defence group. "They probably killed around 100 of our community leaders," says El Dorado's present mayor, Freddy Díaz.

Soon bodies began turning up in the fields and in the streets of both towns. Of El Castillo's seven mayors since 1988, three were murdered, one survived an assassination attempt, a fifth resigned and fled to the mountains to become a guerrilla and another left the country and is living in exile in Chile.

The conflict worsened in 1997 when El Dorado's armed resistance movement was absorbed into the AUC, the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia, a nationally organized right-wing group.

"Things got quite out of hand," recalls Arimateo Cepeda a teacher at a rural school in Villa Esperanza, on the way to El Castillo. "Once we were invited by some El Dorado teachers to play a soccer match, and during the game an armed gang sent us packing with clubs and machetes, when they learned we were from El Castillo. We had to return home in torn clothing after running for over 20 kilometres."

A year later, Gonzalo Agudelo, then Peace Adviser for the governor's office of Meta, the province where both municipalities are located, sought out Father Crisanto Ramos, an aide to the provincial Governor, Alan Jara, to try to bring

Deogracias Silva, who never made it past third grade, has become an agricultural expert after participating in a programme to optimize agricultural production processes.

the two parties together. Surprisingly, the idea bore fruit some months later, when, at a meeting held in the nearby town of Cubarral, around 250 leaders from El Castillo and El Dorado signed a peace agreement.

A rapprochement

"We inform the armed groups present in the region that we have decided to initiate a process of reconciliation," began the text that was read out that evening to much applause and cheering. The document ended by expressing the will of the people that the men of violence should not involve them in their war.

To seal the new-found sense of unity, the National and Provincial Governments, together with the mayors' offices, decided to asphalt the 23 kilometres of the rough road, reducing the journey time from one community to another to 15 minutes. The old bridge, which during times of trouble marked the frontline, was re-renamed *Puente de la Amistad*—the Bridge of Friendship.

The end of the conflict brought other welcome changes. In 1985, almost 800 students attended El Dorado's school, with this number falling to 40 by 1997, as the institution became another battlefield in the ideological struggle between the two sides and as fear prevented children from learning. Now the campus is a place for peace-building, with 997 students.

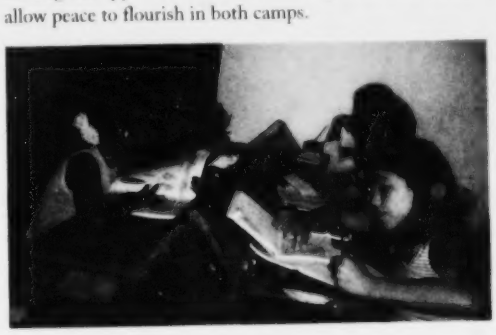
"We are truly a community for peace," says Benjamín Sánchez, an educator at the El Dorado school. "In addition, we have PTA meetings where one dad who is a guerrilla member may end up sitting alongside a dad who belongs to a paramilitary organization, without realizing it! And all in perfect harmony."

The peace process, which even won Colombia's National Peace Prize in 2002, is moving forward despite all the threats and obstacles. Gonzalo Agudelo, who has worked on the reconciliation and is now a UN adviser, notes that a photo of the 1998 signing agreement reflects the hard struggle to keep reconciliation alive. Of the people shown in the photo, Governor Alan Jara, one of the signatories, was kidnapped in July 2001, and is still being held by FARC guerrillas. Next to him are community leaders Leonardo Moreno, who was assassinated in 2001 and Mario Castro and Delio Ortiz, who were violently killed in 2002.

Sustainable peace

The end of the conflict led to the birth of the Alto Ariari Association of Municipalities, a project involving the sub-region's seven towns, including El Dorado and El Castillo. "Our mission is to plan development together," says the Association's director, José Luis Bociga. "We have a list of goals running up to 2014."

UNDP has played an important role in the Association's plans, financing projects that are working to change the culture of violence into one of reconciliation and, above all, seeking out opportunities for economic growth that would allow peace to flourish in both camps.



There are now 997 students in El Dorado's school—at the height of the violence, there were only 40.

UNDP has been working to promote better coordination and local dialogue in the region. Through its REDES programme, it has been working with the regional government to develop a landmine removal strategy as well as development plans. The initiative has also forged partnerships with civil society, particularly through the Regional Peace and Development Programme, Cordepaz, which has worked with 2,000 community leaders from 70 local organizations.

Swords into plowshares

The most advanced of these ventures is 'Sembradores de Esperanza' (sowers of hope) which started off with 120 families in 2002 and now involves 450. UNDP, through its Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, has invested close to US$50,000 in this programme, which aims to optimize agricultural production processes

The bridge between El Dorado and El Castillo used to mark the frontline of the war between the two towns. Today it is called the Bridge of Friendship.

AT A GLANCE

Population: 43.5 million

Area: 1,138,910 sq km

Human Development Ranking: 73 of 177 countries

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: 0.7

Public expenditure on education as % of GDP: 4.4

Public expenditure on health as % of GDP: 3.6

Military expenditure as % of GDP: 4.2

GDP per capita: $6,370

Source: Human Development Report 2004

Village seedbeds in El Dorado are providing farmers with plants and seeds.

among rural workers in the area and help them to get organized and trained so that they can access the national and international market economies. The whole thing is set within a framework of ecological sustainability which involves replacing the old methods of fumigation and chemical fertilizers with natural substances.

Deogracias Silva, who calls himself 'Don Diogas,' never made it past his third year of primary education and who reads with great difficulty, has learned so much about natural fertilizers and fungicides based on manure, wild plants and other resources that he now teaches a class in agriculture at the municipal college. A farmhand from the Brisas del Ariari area of El Dorado, Don Diogas and his family are now working in the communal seedbeds that have been set up as part of a seed and knowledge exchange programme to provide farmers with plants and seeds.

In the near future, Don Diogas and a group of rural workers from El Dorado and El Castillo are planning to go ahead with a project based on medicinal and aromatic plants. Sandra Madrigal, an economist at the Association, points out that UNDP has already carried out a study into which plants could most easily be commercialized and the most appropriate markets, especially international ones, to target. ■

Sergio Ocampo is a reporter with the newspaper El Tiempo *and is based in Bogotá, Colombia.*

Hopes for Enduring Guatemalan Peace as MINUGUA Nears End

QUICHÉ, GUATEMALA

Guatemala has made considerable progress since the 1996 peace accord between the Government of Guatemala and guerrillas ended 36 years of armed conflict, but MINUGUA, the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala that is now wrapping up its operations in the country, is leaving a transition programme in place to ensure that the peace process continues.

Photo: UNV Guatemala

María Salomé Us Alvarez meeting with indigenous leaders. People, she says, need to be reassured that their rights will be protected.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a report, said the peace process had matured to the point where Guatemala is now able to deal peacefully with all its unresolved issues. While serious human rights abuses have stopped and democratic elections have been held, the report notes that the country must still face issues including corruption, crime and a deep-seated legacy of racism and social inequality.

UNDP, along with other UN agencies, is continuing to work in areas such as justice, citizen's security by working with various police institutions, as well as for greater multiculturalism, the promotion of development councils and strengthening Guatemalan civil society. With US$400 million in pipeline for peace building activities, work is also progressing in economic development, including rural development, strengthening democracy, peace and reconciliation and developing Guatemala's institutions as well as the peace institutions.

To contribute to a smooth changeover, 60 Guatemalans with backgrounds in human rights were recruited and trained by MINUGUA in early October 2003 to prepare their communities and partnering organizations for the transition and subsequent departure of MINUGUA, the first time that has been done for a UN peacekeeping mission. Working in close partnership with local authorities and human rights institutions, the volunteers ensure that the knowledge and experience acquired by MINUGUA, including the value of volunteerism in advancing human rights, is retained and continues to serve the population.

"Now that the Mission is going to leave, the people are scared that no one will listen to their demands and needs. They do not trust the local authorities," says María Salomé Us Alvarez, a UN Volunteer. "We can approach the local people and explain to them that they must be confident that their rights will be respected."

Ms. Us was seven years old when most of her family was killed during the armed conflict in Guatemala, forcing her and her surviving siblings to fend for themselves.

Now 32, Ms. Us works to ensure human rights are respected and complaints duly addressed. "From my childhood, I knew that I wanted to work to protect indigenous rights. I cannot conceive working on anything else," she says.

Ms. Us, a Maya Quiché, travels throughout the country to speak with indigenous leaders and community groups on rights issues. In one of her recent visits, she realized the importance of having nationals involved in the transition. "A few months ago, we met with a group of indigenous women to talk about their rights. They were immediately surprised. Not because this was the first time they heard about their rights, but it was the first time someone did it in Quiché," says Ms. Us.

Ms. Us says there is still a lot to do. "I am committed to fight for the rights of my people. It will take a lot of time to reestablish people's confidence in the authorities. To reach that point we need to involve everyone in society." ■

—By Verónica Pérez Sueiro and Edwond Misheud of the Communications Unit, UN Volunteers, Bonn, Germany.

Winning the PEACE

AFGHANISTAN

Seizes Chance to Register to Vote

Violence fails to deter people from registering for first election

BY NICK MEO

Photo: Nick Meo/UNDP

MALAN, AFGHANISTAN

The women of Malan village were shuffling through the ladies' registration office set up in the village elder's best room, queuing patiently to get their voting cards for Afghanistan's first free election.

The response in places like Malan made that effort worthwhile. It would cause a riot in Malan if the official photographer asked the women to lift up their *burkhas* for a picture, so instead, the women have a thumb-print taken for identification.

The preparations were organized by the Afghanistan Government with the help of UNDP and by international staff who are veterans of landmark polls in Cambodia, South Africa, Timor-Leste and many other emergent democracies. They are advising Afghans and adding vital logistical support in a job which most say is their biggest challenge ever.

Outside grizzled tribesmen stood guard at strategic points in the village, on rooftops and in its surrounding fruit gardens, with rusting hunting rifles. Some of the younger, wirier men brandished AK-47s.

Serious about security

The tribal levy was not here for show. Before the 31 July deadline for voter registration, the Taliban and criminals seeking to destabilize the government had repeatedly attacked registration officials and would-be voters across the still-unstable south and east of the country.

An Afghan women's registration team was blown up by a bomb left on their bus in Jalalabad, several registered voters were shot dead by the Taliban at a road checkpoint, and a bomb blast killed six people in an attack on a mosque, including two UN workers registering Afghan voters in the central province of Ghazni.

Malan was determined to protect its women and the guests who had come to help. "The election will help to banish war from our country," said Sadiqa, the team leader. She had driven out from nearby Gardez with the others to organize this session. "The election will be positive for Afghanistan and we want to serve our country. It is our duty."

One of her colleagues added that electing a candidate could help the village secure a new well or a vitally needed clinic. But there was one overwhelming reason for supporting the election.

"We don't want any more war," said Karmala, a civic educator. "These elections will help to end fighting in Afghanistan. If Afghans are free to chose their own president we will see our country change, we will see an end to violence and to men with the gun."

More than 10 million Afghans registered for the October election, despite constant security threats.

Below: While men had their pictures taken for voting cards, women had thumb prints taken.

AT A GLANCE

Population: 28.5 million

Area: 647,500 sq km

Life expectancy at birth: 43.1 years

Under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births): 257

Percent of population undernourished: 70

Source: *Human Development Report 2004*

A symbol of pride: a voter ID card.

Elections may be new in Afghanistan, but in this remote corner of the country, people were learning quickly. Malan is in a traditional ethnic Pushtun district where gun-toting clans live behind hulking mud-walled ancestoral fortresses. Women rarely venture outside, and never without a burkha.

Not far away, guerillas have launched sporadic attacks on the giant US military base at Gardez, which looks like a latter-day Wild West fort and sends forth Special Forces patrols hunting for terrorists.

Election officials weren't sure whether deeply conservative villages like this one in a dangerous area would be taking part in Afghanistan's fledgling democratic process. Many officials had been prepared to write off villages in front line areas as too risky.

This village thought otherwise. When elders realized the significance of this October's presidential vote—Afghanistan's first ever attempt at a free election—they sent a delegation to the regional governor insisting that they be included, demanding a registration team be sent out and promising to protect them.

To the surprise of UN staff and Afghan officials from the city, women in Pushtun villages registered in droves.

Registration sites were heavily guarded.

When the registration team arrived in Malan about 700 villagers registered to vote, 400 of them women, part of a nationwide enthusiasm for Afghanistan's infant democracy.

Many hurdles on the way to elections

It was beset by problems in a land not yet at peace, dogged by claims of fraud, desperately short of peacekeepers, and until the last stages lacking promised international cash contributions to run the election.

The presidential election, envisaged for June, was finally set for 9 October and the parliamentary elections were set to next April, splitting them to make the process more manageable.

Veteran international election staff were dismayed by the logistical and security problems. Ray Kennedy, from the Joint Electoral Management Body, commented: "Timor-Leste's first elections were a piece of cake compared to Afghanistan."

But by 20 August, a staggering 10.5 million voters had registered, a late surge in a highly controversial process, which had got off to a very slow start.

For UNDP, helping Afghans run this election has been one of the biggest challenges ever. About US$200 million has been spent on the project, begun in August 2003, that has sent more than 3,500 Afghan registration teams, male and female, on the difficult task of registering a nation recovering from 24 years of war which has never known a proper census and where people have no birth certificates or documentation.

UNDP's technical help to the Afghan Government has ranged from helicopter transport for officials to setting up a huge data centre in Kabul, a building full of young people that looks like a call centre, to coordinate the massive effort.

A civic education campaign to teach the importance of the elections made use of TV slots, mobile cinemas and a massive poster campaign. Three hundred international UN volunteers worked for six months to add their help, working alongside thousands of Afghan volunteers.

According to Jerome Leyraud, UNDP Project Manager, everything started late and short of money.

"This is the most important election project for UNDP for a long time," he said. "In terms of security and the institutional vacuum, it is the most sensitive—we have a government which is not 100 percent in charge of its territory and not 100 percent at peace. It's not going to be perfect, but what is important is it will help pave the way for democracy.

"What has been encouraging has been the big turnout for registration. And the turnout to vote will demonstrate if the Afghan people have the willingness to reassert the power of the Kabul government. The provinces want the rule of law and want to get rid of warlords and feudalism.

"This process may help start the modernization of Afghanistan."

Registration has been carried out in refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, and security contractors have supervised registration in areas too dangerous for the UN, and tribal

power structures have been utilized in areas like Gardez where tribal leaders have supported the process.

Eric Pondaven, UN political affairs officer in the south-east region that includes Gardez, said getting tribal structures involved had been the key to success in his area. "The first phase of registration in December 2003 was extremely slow and only 12 percent of the registered voters were women at first," he says.

"But the tribal councils—the *shuras*—became involved, security was upgraded, and with time the situation completely changed. "There has only been one district where security was too bad for people to register and in our region 650,000 people out of about 800,000 have registered and the proportion of women has been over 40 percent. We are very happy with that."

In deeply conservative Pushtun areas to the south where Taliban sympathy remains strong, registration of women has been much lower however—about 20 percent around Kandahar.

Other regions have seen much higher female registration—53 percent among the Hazara people in central Afghanistan. Nationally 42 percent of the more than 8.5 million voters registered by the end of July were women—a staggering success. ■

Nick Meo is a freelance reporter who has extensively covered Afghanistan and has previously reported for CHOICES.

A Rough Road Home for DRC Ex-Combatants

KALEMIE, CONGO

After almost a decade of civil strife, going home again is difficult for the tens of thousands of ex-combatants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Persuading ex-combatants to leave the bush and return to society requires a complete programme of guidance and support, according to Zenaide Gatelli, 28, a UN Volunteer from Italy who has been working with former fighters throughout the country. "It's not just laying down their weapons and then heading home. These ex-combatants have a lot to work through, a lot to talk about before they can go back to living a normal civilian life," says Ms. Gatelli. "The fact that I am used to listening to other people is definitely a help, but sometimes it is tough, especially when you hear about some of the crimes they committed."

Now stationed in Kalemie, a small city situated on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in south-eastern Congo, Gatelli, who previously worked to counsel female sex workers in Italy, and with physically and mentally challenged people in Kosovo, is trying to work with the ex-combatants and with the local populations, who are not so sure they want the veterans to return.

In mid-May, she was involved in the registration of a group of 535 ex-combatants who voluntarily and spontaneously disarmed. "When talking with the ex-combatants you can tell that they are troubled," she says. "Many are worried about going home, as they know they may go back to find out that their own families have been killed and homes destroyed."

With the majority of the ex-combatants—adult males between the ages of 18 to 35—possessing no formal education and many unable to read and write, she says they count on the country's newly-launched plan for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to provide them with a better future.

To prepare these projects at the local level, Ms. Gatelli visits communities and meets with NGOs and local authorities to determine project feasibility and to prepare plans for action. She says the reconstruction of schools and health facilities are priority projects. "A lot of these services and buildings have been destroyed, so it is practical to get the ex-combatants involved in rebuilding their communities."

The Congolese Government has also requested the support of local and international NGOs to take the lead in this component of the plan to rebuild. Trainings organized by the NGOs will help the ex-combatants acquire skills in farming, fishing, and other small income-generating activities.

Photo: UN Volunteers

Zenaide Gatelli talking to former fighters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

An equally important element in the plan is preparing the receiving communities. Many groups, especially women's organizations, have expressed concern in welcoming former fighters into their communities. Ms. Gatelli says education is the only way to change opinions. "We can't ignore what a lot of these ex-combatants have done. We know their history and the community knows their history. So we have to address that as well," she explains. The reconciliation process is gaining momentum, she says, because of effective awareness raising campaigns that promote peaceful reintegration, and through the work of NGOs who are sensitizing communities on the process.

"Of course, this process isn't something that will happen overnight. We are looking at months, even longer, before everything is in place," she says. "Regardless of how long it takes, these ex-combatants need to be supported to come back to civil life. It's not an easy task, but we can't let them continue fighting." ■

—By Edward Misbaud, Communications Unit, UN Volunteers, Bonn, Germany.

Winning the PEACE

BURUNDI Projects Aim for Food Security and Ethnic Tolerance

Hutus, Tutsis, join in programme for market-oriented food cultivation

Photo: Aaron Nsavimana/UNDP

Programmes aimed at promoting food security, particularly among vulnerable households, are also reducing ethnic tensions.

BY JEAN NZEYIMANA

KARUSI, BURUNDI

It is the water hyacinth and the predatory birds that hover near the fish ponds that pose the greatest danger to the Hutus and Tutsis who are raising fish near Murotso hill. In Murotso, the Hutus and Tursis are learning to trust each other again.

Different communities living around the marshes in Karusi province in northeast Burundi have worked together to bring the ponds back into service themselves, without having to employ labourers. The ponds have been divided in two, with those on the left bank given to the inhabitants of Karuri and those on the right to the inhabitants of Murotso, ensuring that the Hutus from the hills and the Tutsis from the displaced persons' camps come together.

"Now, the Tutsis from the Kigoma camp visit the Hutus in Cuba, Karuri or Gisenyi and vice-versa," says Léonard Ndayikengurutse, 31, who heads a committee at the seed centre in Nyamugari. "Before, that wasn't possible because of the people who divided us and pushed us to massacre one another with machetes."

The change has been made possible by UNDP's Community Assistance Umbrella Programme, which, through UNDP's Africa 2000 Plus Network and the NGO World Vision, has established projects to boost the incomes of the rural population through fish farming, agriculture and livestock rearing. The projects, which cost about US$861,076, aim to promote food security particularly among displaced people and vulnerable households. But the projects are also aiming to overcome the ethnic tension generated by the war.

Rebuilding lives

It wasn't long after the fighting started in 1993 that Léocadie Inaciza, 43, a Hutu, lost everything she had. But she now belongs to a small association of 15 people, including five widows, known as "Ubaka," or "build," that has given her new hope.

"I had nothing left, I was totally alone," says Ms. Inaciza. "I wanted to be amongst other people." While she says that her association is still young and without much money, "I have hope for the future."

Marcelline Ntegamaso, a local from a hill known as Karuri who belongs to the "Tuzamurane" ("united to bounce back") association, says she hopes that the project will allow her to raise her seven children. Once a week, she

It took some time for Hutus, normally farmers, to get used to handling livestock.

roots out the dreaded water hyacinth from the ponds, and the rest of the time she works as a gardener, cultivating the fields on the slopes of the hill and feeding the livestock.

Cyprien Vyuzura, a project official, says there were difficulties to overcome in order to help the Hutus, who tended to favour agriculture, to manage the cows. "The people around here saw cows as wild animals which could feed themselves. We taught them that a cow is an animal that can be tamed. Now they've really taken to rearing livestock because they can see how much profit they will make."

The Murotso farm is already producing small quantities of milk which is sold in the Karusi market. The money is deposited in an account at the Savings and Credit Cooperative in Karusi. But fish farming is the main activity, with 21 ponds stocked and operational again.

"The projects that are implemented by communities like those in Karusi are providing the foundation for sustainable development in Burundi," says Adama Coulibaly, the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Burundi. "They are helping to improve living conditions and they are enormously contributing to bringing peace by helping bring back trust and to live in a peaceful environment."

Participating in decisions and work

According to Patricia Desrousseaux, a programme official, what counts is the people are involved at the different levels of project development and implementation, so there is a guarantee that the communities will take over the projects once the NGO has withdrawn.

Arthémon Gihimbare, a UNDP Community Assistance Umbrella Programme expert on monitoring and evaluation says participation begins during the identification of the projects. "The process of involving people, from identification, right up to 'handing back the keys' of the project, means that beneficiary communities better understand the project, take responsibility, regain their independence little by little, rather than depending on outside help."

World Vision, however, is basing its implementation strategy on a few 'pilot' rural dwellers serving as a model for others. Léonidas Ndikuriyo, assistant to the field coordinator in Karusi, says, "Our strategy is based on strengthening capacities. We develop the idea of participants and not of beneficiaries."

The problem, he says, is to make people understand that this will affect their interests in the long-term. "People don't give a 100 percent because they are attracted by other work. As our projects have long-term aims, people might well not participate because they want to see results in the short-term."

Still, the projects have continued to attract new participants. In Buhinyuza, a stone's throw from Karusi, World Vision has set up a warehouse open to 1,900 rural dwellers belonging to an independent cooperative. A seed centre in Nyamugari covers 50 hectares of land granted by the commune to the 2,000 rural dwellers who are divided into groups of 20 to 25. The farm has 96 head of livestock, 25 of which are heifers, whose main job is to produce organic manure to fertilize the fields. All the necessary work is carried out without any payment on the part of World Vision.

The farm's produce is sold by the farmers who use part of their earnings to buy medicine and replacement animals. In the beginning, World Vision bought up all of the produce, but now the farmers must market their own produce.

Jacques Nzigo, 41, a leader of a farmers group, wants World Vision to continue to find markets for the farmers. "Without guaranteed markets, we'll be making a loss."

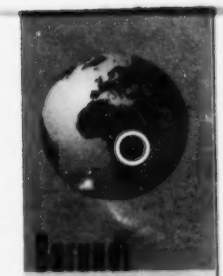
But Mr. Gihimbare says, "When it comes to food security, one or two years is not really enough to be able to talk about sustainability. It's just the beginning of a process. Certain activities require consolidation at the risk of losing some achievements. It's clear that on the ground there are some beneficiaries who have made more progress than others and there are those who are progressing slowly."

Nevertheless, as the Provincial Governor's main adviser, Charles Rugema points out, the two projects are operating to general satisfaction. "Otherwise, we would have evicted them!" he says jokingly. ■

Jean Nzeyimana has worked as a reporter, editor and college-level journalism instructor. He is now a freelance writer based in Bujumbura, Burundi.

The fish ponds at Murotso farm have provided Hutus and Tutsis an opportunity to work together to produce food.

Left: Clearing water hyacinths from the ponds. The fast-growing plant can choke the pond and kill the fish.



AT A GLANCE

Population: 6.6 million

Area: 27,830 sq km

Human Development Ranking: 173 of 177 countries

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: 6.0

Public expenditure on education as % of GDP: 3.6

Public expenditure on health as % of GDP: 2.1

Military expenditure as % of GDP: 7.6

GDP per capita: $630

Source: *Human Development Report 2004*

Winning the PEACE

GUINEA-BISSAU Clears Landmines

BY ANTONIO ALY SILVA

Demining operations open opportunities for development

BISSAU, GUINEA-BISSAU

After harvesting some cashews in a forest, Quinta Nanque was preparing to return home when she stepped on a landmine. She lost her left leg.

"I stumbled upon the wrong place," she says, "but I hope that nobody else needs to experience what happened to me."

And Wilson Mendonça was playing soccer in 2000 when the ball went off the playing field. "I ran onto an open field and the worst possible thing happened," he recalls. "My friends came looking for me and I was taken to hospital." He too lost his left leg.

Five years after a civil war devastated the country, land mines are still taking a toll here. But the country has a plan to rid the capital, Bissau, of mines by 2005 and the rest of the country by 2009.

At the end of the war, in 2000, the government asked UNDP for assistance to remove landmines, and UNDP, with assistance from Canada, the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands and the US, established a National Centre for Coordinating Mine Action Activities. Sixteen zones throughout the country were identified as highly likely to have landmines and the authorities prepared an ambitious plan to remove the explosives, also referred to as "silent killers."

César Carvalho, an engineer who leads the National Centre, says the national effort stressed tried and true methods of demining rather than on looking for newfangled methods. "We don't waste time on inventions, trying to keep up with more advanced countries," he says. "But there are difficulties."

According to Albéric Kacou, UNDP Resident Representative in Guinea-Bissau, these problems are especially acute in a country which has faced an institutional and political crisis in recent years. "However, in spite of the crisis," he says, the mine clearance programme "has become sufficiently influential to continue coordinating all mine clearance efforts in Guinea-Bissau." Still, Mr. Kacou says that the project's prospects for success also depends on resources. "Provided everything proceeds according to plan, Bissau will be free of mines by 2005, and the rest of the country by 2009."

Photo: Antonio Aly Silva/UNDP

Clearing mines

The project relies on two national NGOs—LUTCAM and HUMAID—to conduct mine clearance operations. From November 2000 to July 2004, the two organizations cleaned up 725,535 square metres of land, removing 2,587 mines and approximately 30,000 explosive devices.

Work is done using minesweepers, with the machines maintaining a distance of not less than 30 metres, and every 30 minutes the minesweeper driver is replaced by another colleague, in accordance with the safety criteria imposed by the International Mine Action Standards.

N'tum Na Tusse, director of LUTCAM and a mines specialist, says the organization received a significant amount of assistance from UNDP that includes equipment and training. Some training was provided in Mozambique, which faced a similar landmine problem.

The mine clearance programme is also working to help the victims. Quinta Nanque has set up a kiosk to sell goods at a market, while Wilson Mendonça has finished seventh grade. The Ministry of Education says it is mindful of the need to help other young people overcome landmine injuries and continue their education so that they can gain their independence and make their contribution to their country. ■

Antonio Aly Silva is a journalist from Guinea-Bissau who writes on topics related to international issues.

Above: Wilson Mendonça, left, and Quinta Nanque, both lost limbs to landmines.

Left: Minesweepers planning the day's work, and bottom, clearing mines.

AT A GLANCE

Population: 1.4 million

Area: 36,120 sq km

Human Development Ranking: 172 of 177 countries

HIV prevalence as % of ages 15-49 years: n/a

Public expenditure on education as % of GDP: 2.1

Public expenditure on health as % of GDP: 3.2

Military expenditure as % of GDP: n/a

GDP per capita: $710

Source: *Human Development Report 2004*

World Leaders Discuss the Development Agenda

Next September will mark the fifth anniversary of the unanimous adoption by world leaders of the Millennium Development Goals that call for, among other things, halving extreme poverty by 2015. The UN General Assembly, at that time, will hold a conference to measure progress towards meeting those goals. This year, 82 Heads of State and Government addressed the General Assembly, and while global security issues and terrorism dominated the discussions, CHOICES found that development issues were still very much on the agenda. Here are some development-related excerpts from the speeches of Heads of State or Government to the General Assembly.

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

Paul Martin

Ricardo Lagos Escobar

Abel Pacheco de la Espriella

Ismail Omar Guelleh

Dr. Manmohan Singh

Junichiro Koizumi

Brazil, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—What sets civilization apart from barbarism is the political architecture that promotes peaceful change and advances social and economic life by means of democratic consensus. If we fail against hunger and poverty, what else could bring us together?

Canada, Prime Minister Paul Martin—The objectives of the Millennium Summit on poverty, disease and global insecurity will come to naught if we do not follow up on the Monterrey consensus, to wit: genuine development requires a holistic approach to such issues as debt, market access and social investment.

Chile, President Ricardo Lagos Escobar—In our view, the best way to guide the agenda of globalization is through multilateralism. It is in the strengthening of multilateralism that each country has a stake and a national task to fulfill.

Costa Rica, President Abel Pacheco de la Espriella—It is noteworthy that, in 2003, the world reached a new record by devoting US$956 billion to military expenditure. This represents 17 times the amount of resources devoted, worldwide, to official development assistance and more than the sum of the foreign debt of the 64 countries with the lowest GDP. These numbers show that mankind has not understood yet that security does not result from a multiplication of the weapons but from a multiplication of the loaves of bread.

Djibouti, President Ismail Omar Guelleh—Now, in the post 9/11 world, a new rationale for aid is emerging. Aid is increasingly seen as a potent force in the war on terror by providing support to both frontline and weak states where terrorism could breed. Additionally, there is a mounting recognition that global poverty and inequality threaten national security interests. Despite this realization, however, aid programmes have become more selective and designed to reach a small group of countries who are in some way "qualified." The problem is that many countries fail to qualify for aid. Something must be done for the millions suffering in those countries, as well. To ignore them is at our own peril.

European Union, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Bernard Bot—We have committed ourselves to combating poverty and promoting sustainable development. The MDGs must be achieved. Urgent action is called for. Both developing and developed countries must set in place a range of measures which include good governance, expansion of trade opportunities, in particular for developing countries and an increase in Official Development Assistance, as agreed at the Monterrey Conference. The EU is committed to these objectives. It is very much on track in increasing its ODA to 0.39 percent of GNP in 2006 as part of a longer-term effort to raise ODA contributions to 0.7 percent of GNP.

India, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh—Development today is no longer a function of domestic resources and national policies alone. It is a process that is integrally linked to the international economic environment. The international community must find ways to contracting the circles of exclusion. We need to find innovative sources of financing and access to technologies that are necessary to assist those who are on the margins of globalization. Just as prosperity cannot be sustained by being walled in, poverty cannot be banished to some invisible periphery.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

King Mohammed VI

Joaquim Alberto Chissano

Sam Nujoma

Olusegun Obasanjo

Pervez Musharraf

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

Benjamin William Mkapa

George W. Bush

Japan, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi—After the Second World War, Japan experienced a dramatic economic recovery, with the help of the international community. On the basis of our own experience, we are keenly aware that, in promoting international cooperation, self-help efforts are essential to overcoming difficulties and achieving a prosperous society. Japan's ODA therefore has been based on the principle of "ownership and partnership."

Malaysia, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi—I speak from the experience of my own country, Malaysia, where we have shown the way that Islam is not an impediment to modernity and to democracy. It is not an impediment to rapid economic growth, to self-respect and confidence, to tolerance and mutual respect across religions, cultures and ethnic groups. In Malaysia, we celebrate the multi-ethnicity of our people, of Malaysians. For us, our multi-ethnic and cultural diversity is a national asset. It has taught us to be tolerant, value mutual respect and cooperate for the common good.

Morocco, King Mohammed VI—It is Africa that suffers the most from the scourges of poverty, hunger, desertification and deadly epidemics, in addition to the problems of illegal immigration, refugees and forced displacement, which countries of the South cannot effectively cope with on their own, without successful regional and international coordination, and effective support for local development efforts.

Mozambique, President Joaquim Alberto Chissano—Mozambique has been hailed as a post-conflict peace-building success. We have learned how important and essential peace is for our economy and for our lives. In Mozambique, peace brought stability and progress, allowing us to resume our development plans.

Namibia, President Sam Nujoma—We cannot ignore the ever widening income gap between the rich and the poor, between the industrialized North and the developing South. This situation represents a dangerous time bomb which the world can ill afford to let take its own course. Our planet earth is too small to perpetuate the unacceptable co-existence of abject poverty and abundance of prosperity within its fold.

Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo—Our quest for global peace and security will prove unsuccessful unless we intensify international cooperation for development and the reduction of poverty. Only four years ago we adopted the Millennium Development Goals which pointedly fixed a target of 2015 for reducing by half those living in poverty. Yet by now, alarm is being raised that if present trends continue, that target may not be met, particularly in Africa which apart from the challenges of development is also being ravaged by pandemic diseases.

Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf—The global cooperation against terrorism has been highly successful. Determined and collective action has contained and disrupted the violent agendas of the terrorists. We are winning the battle against terrorists. However, what we are doing is insufficient to win the ultimate war against them. The immediate anti-terrorist response has to be accompanied by a clear, long-term strategy striking at the root of the problem if we are to ensure final success against this scourge. The industrialized world must support the endeavour for an Islamic renaissance especially through adequate financial and technical assistance and larger trade opportunities.

Spain, Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero—Spain endorses the Millennium Declaration objectives as regards development, poverty eradication and preservation of the environment. Poverty is the main cause of uncontrolled migration flows. Let us be certain that no wall, however tall, will prevent those who endure extreme poverty from trying to escape and pursue their dignity as human beings.

Tanzania, President Benjamin William Mkapa—It is true money is not a panacea, but the eighth MDG—"Develop a Global Partnership for Development"—may actually be the single most important key to unlocking new initiatives and latent capacities to enable the attainment of the MDGs. And a genuine partnership implies shared rights and responsibilities, as well as a shared commitment to be evaluated.

United States, President George W. Bush—Because we believe in human dignity, America and many nations have changed the way we fight poverty, curb corruption, and provide aid. In 2002 we created the Monterrey Consensus, a bold approach that links new aid from developed nations to real reform in developing ones. And through the Millennium Challenge Account, my nation is increasing our aid to developing nations that expand economic freedom and invest in the education and health of their own people. ■

THE SPORTS CHALLENGE

A Winning Formula for Development

Low cost, universally understood and pclitically neutral, sports can be a potent means of promoting physical well-being, peace and development.

Recognizing the power of sports, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education and governments and businesses from around the world are looking at ways to use sports to help advance peace processes and spur development initiatives.

"I have witnessed so many impressive examples of how sport can improve people's lives," says Adolf Ogi, the UN Secretary-General's Representative for Sport and Development. "On one hand sport can be used to contribute to peace-building, reconciliation and healing in post-conflict societies, on the other hand it can prevent conflict for many reasons, particularly because it brings people of different origins, religions and races together."

According to Mr. Ogi, the International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 will gain strength through innumerable activities in many countries. "The main goal is to permanently establish the common understanding of the necessity and the value of sport and physical education for education, health, development and peace," he says.

Sports has long been used to bring people together. In addition to promoting health and fitness at the local level, sports also brings people together for causes. People run and walk to raise money to fight diseases and they pay to see stars play in benefits for good causes.

In Basel, Switzerland, a star-studded soccer match in 2003 featuring Ronaldo and Zinédine Zidane netted about US$800,000 for UNDP livelihood projects in the Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

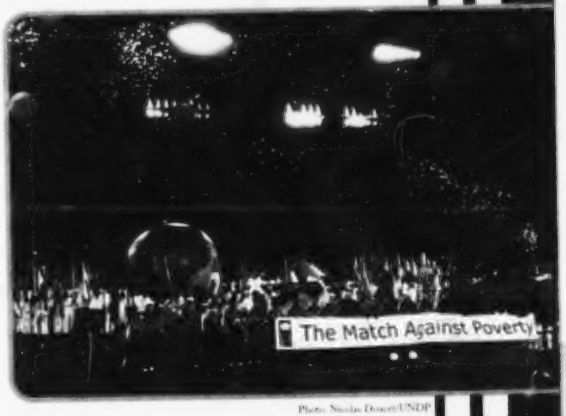


Photo: Nicolo Dunant/UNDP

Cricket Goes to Bat Against Insecurity In Bangladesh

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

When evening comes, virtually any dry scrap of land is transformed into a cricket pitch. And for a few, brief hours, these dry spots are claimed by cricket players as neutral spaces, where background, religion, or political beliefs no longer matter.

This is a country that is passionate about cricket and even the recent flood, which submerged two-thirds of Bangladesh couldn't dampen peoples' desire to play. It is a passion that can also be tapped to unite people for development, according to former Bangladesh cricket Captain Akram Khan, who joined several national celebrities to help UNDP launch the Bangla version of the first national human security report in a very unique way—with a game of cricket.

Photo: UNDP Bangladesh

"Cricket is not a game for individuals, it's about teamwork," says Mr. Khan. "Likewise, if we are serious about building a safer society for all, we need teamwork."

The report was the first comprehensive study of the root causes of increasing insecurity in the country. Written by leading Bangladeshi experts, the report found that national development was hindered by a lack of law and order and that the formal justice system—hamstrung by corruption, inefficiency, and outdated laws—was unable to cope with spreading crime. In a country where 49 percent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, the system disadvantaged the poor and that most people were simply "priced out" of justice.

"Human insecurity is like a cancer—no single group of people or causes can be blamed for it, and it can only be tackled by all segments of society working closely together—the government, academia, political parties, civil society, local communities and the private sector," said UNDP Resident Representative, Jorgen Lissner. ■

—By Lisa Hiller, communications officer, UNDP Bangladesh.

Gazans Learn to Row and Navigate Conflict

Photo: UNDP PAPP

Gaza Strip

Over 100 children between the ages of 12 and 14 have been given the opportunity to take up rowing here since February 2003, something previously unknown to the people living in the crowded Shaati Beach Refugee Camp.

UNDP is supporting the Palestine Olympic Committee and Palestinian Rowing Federation to improve sport management and enable Gazan children to learn the skills of rowing.

A Palestinian-American UNV, Ghassan Haddad, has worked with the Palestine Olympic Committee under the UNDP programme TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals), which enables home countries to benefit from the skills and expertise of their own expatriates. Under TOKTEN, Mr. Haddad helped develop an assessment and short-term recommendations for improving the committee's management performance, explains Mounir Kleibo, with UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People.

Everyone involved in the rowing project, from athletes to trainers to administration, has learned the importance of working together. The programme, which has 37 girls and 33 boys, includes fitness lessons and eight weeks of swimming training in the Mediterranean, culminated in the first ever Palestinian Indoor Rowing Championship in November 2003, an achievement in itself given the difficult circumstances in Gaza.

"Practice is the best thing in my life," says Aisha, 14. "It is what helps me to be strong. And I feel that way because of rowing practice."

The UNV/TOKTEN programme offered me an ideal way to combine my love of sports and Palestine," says Mr. Haddad. "I was able to make a contribution to the overall sport system and have a positive long-term impact on the lives of the youth whom I coached and mentored at the community level in my spare time." ■

—By Isabelle Humphries, a freelance writer based in Jerusalem, who has previously written for CHOICES.

Greek and Turkish Cypriot Youths on Voyage of Understanding

Limassol, Cyprus

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots offered each other an olive branch of friendship when they teamed up with young people from other countries on a special programme, *Voyage of Understanding*, in July 2004.

Aimed at promoting peace and friendship among different nationalities, cultures and religions, the nine-night sail on the 60 metre square-rigged brig *Stavros S. Niarchos* departed from Limassol, Cyprus on 14 July 2004 and arrived in Crete, Greece on 22 July 2004.

Organized by the UK-based Tall Ships Youth Trust, the idea was developed for a special voyage in which young Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would live and work together on board a square-rigged sailing ship. The Tall Ships Youth Trust agreed to reserve 16 of the berths for Cypriots on this trip.

"Sailing provides a great environment for breaking down barriers and encouraging friendships among opposites. It's a life-building experience which will at the very least help foster understanding between the peoples of the island of Cyprus," said Tim Law, a director of Tall Ships Youth Trust. UNDP's Bi-communal Development Programme in Cyprus, which is funded by USAID and UNDP, contributed to the voyage.

On board, six Greek Cypriots and nine Turkish Cypriots formed part of the crew of 48, which was split into three watches. The novice sailors were able to take the helm, undertake galley duties, play an active part in daily and nightly watches, learn basic navigation skills, set and handle the sails, and develop a head for heights as they scaled the two 40-metre masts to set the sails of the vessel far above the Mediterranean waves. ■

—By Marina Papageorgiu, communications officer, UNDP/UNOPS Cyprus.

Photos: UNDP Kyrgyzstan

Central Asia: Wrestling with Border Tensions

Osh, Kyrgyzstan

The border region where Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan meet in the Ferghana Valley is fraught with complications and disputes. But when 15 volleyball teams from the three countries met, the men's team from Osh, Kyrgyzstan and the women's team from Namangan province, Uzbekistan, came out as the undisputed winners.

But the real winners were the people of the region, who have seen that sports has helped reduce tensions. According to Abdiraim Jorokulov, Programme Manager of UNDP's conflict prevention programme in south Kyrgyzstan, the international tournament among youth representing local communities throughout the Ferghana Valley has become a tradition. "These volleyball tournaments are aimed to enhance peace and social harmony in the region, develop peoples' diplomacy and to strengthen friendly relationships between cross-border communities of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan," he says.

In addition to the volleyball tournaments, more than 5,000 people came together to celebrate jointly the Muslim New Year "Nooruz," at festivals in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that featured sports competitions like the "Marathon of Friendship" and "Kyrösh," a tradition of wrestling shared by both nations.

With an ethnically-mixed population, scarce natural resources, poverty and a largely divided infrastructure, the region showed its vulnerability to a long history of interethnic conflicts, border incidences and clashes between ethnic groups. ■

—By Olga Grebennikova, communications officer, UNDP Kyrgyzstan.

Chile Launches Sports Programme to Promote Peace and Fight Poverty

Santiago, Chile

The children came from rich neighbourhoods, from middle class families and from poorer communities, and they came to play soccer to mark International Youth Day.

Some 1,200 children from local schools watched the matches at a stadium in a working class area of the city, waving blue balloons protesting against poverty and sending messages in support of young people, greater social unity, peace and equal opportunity. They were joined by Marcelo Espina, a former player of the Colo Colo team—the most popular professional football team in Chile—who signed soccer balls and autographs for the children.

The same day, as Chile played Colombia in a rough qualifying game for the World Cup to be held in Germany in 2006, a banner reading "Match Against Poverty-UNDP" was unfurled beside the crowded football stadium. The game ended 0-0.

These were the first activities of a new Sports for Peace and Development Programme that was recently launched in Chile by UNDP, the first of its kind in Latin America. The programme hopes to showcase the benefits of sport by harnessing athletic pursuits as a tool for achieving development and greater social cohesion, and helping to focus on a range of concerns, including education, health and jobs, while promoting tolerance and respect for human rights. ■

—By María Elena Hurtado, communications officer, UNDP Chile.

Photo: UNDP Chile

Belarus Sports and Pop Stars Unite in Fight Against HIV/AIDS

Soligorsk, Belarus

It wasn't by chance that Maksim Mirny, the Belarusian tennis star, stopped in the town of Soligorsk to offer some pointers to young tennis players. The town, which has one of the highest rates of new HIV/AIDS infections, has also been at the forefront of efforts to reverse that statistic, and Mr. Mirny's appearance was part of that effort.

Mr. Mirny, a UNAIDS National Goodwill Ambassador on HIV/AIDS, joined UNDP's campaign "Sport and Pop Stars Against AIDS" that has played a significant role in raising awareness about the disease in Belarus.

In Soligorsk, Mr. Mirny gave an "open lesson" to young tennis players and answered their questions. In 2003, UN experts included the town on a list of seven places worldwide that have been most successful in preventing HIV infection among drug users.

"I am very happy that many Belarusian sports stars and singers have joined me," says Mr. Mirny. "Together we did our best to reach out to every young person with the relevant information and I hope that the campaign helped in changing public perception of the HIV/AIDS problem."

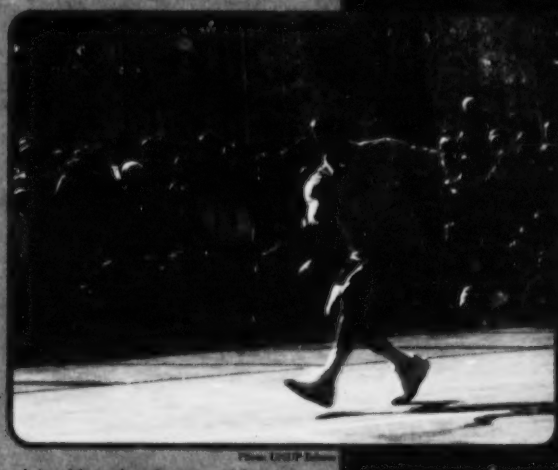


Photo: UNDP Belarus

At a concert earlier this year in Minsk, Mr. Mirny was joined by other famous athletes at a concert, "Sport and Pop Stars Against AIDS." Accompanied by various music groups representing a broad range of styles, the concert drew about 3,000 people, mostly between the ages of 16 and 22. ■

—By Vladimir Radvenovsky, communications officer, UNDP Belarus.

African Athletes Promote MDGs

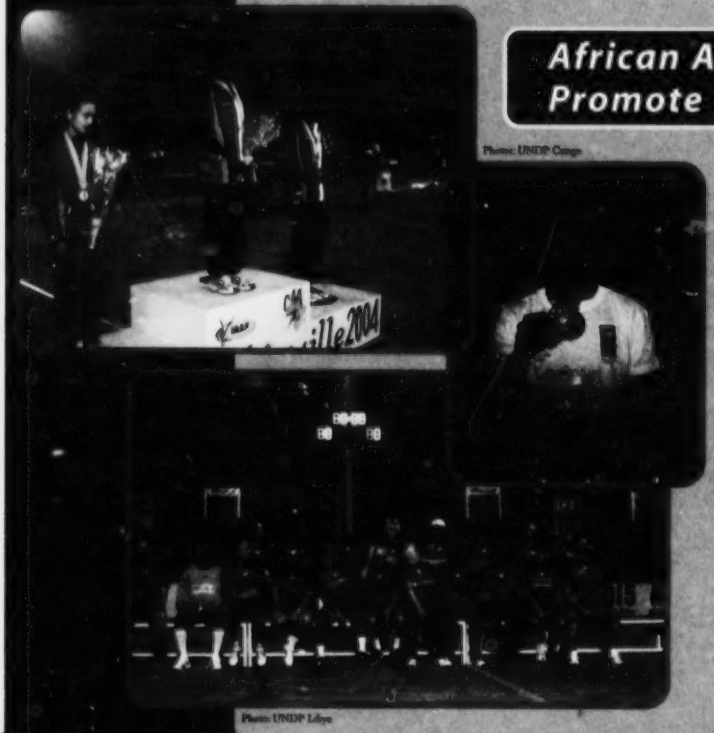


Photo: UNDP Congo

Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo

The July African Athletic Championship in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, offered athletes an opportunity, a chance, to compete on an all-Africa basis and to help promote the MDGs. ■

—By Guili Tsoumou, communications officer, UNDP Republic of the Congo.

Photo: UNDP Libya

Left: Moussamboute, who lives in France, was successful in his first visit to Africa.

Top left: Athletes at the Brazzaville games receiving their medals.

Below: In Libya, the diplomatic corps played UNDP staff in an exhibition match that focused attention on the MDGs.

BP's Knowledge Expert Commends UNDP Network

With no party winning a clear majority in parliament after Mongolia's general elections last June, it became apparent that the parties would have to form a Grand Coalition Government. Yet with no experience in forming coalitions, the negotiations soon ended in a deadlock.

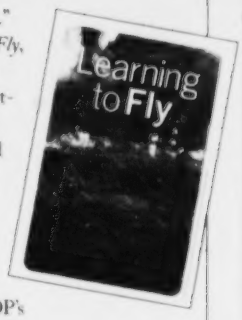
The local UNDP Office turned to UNDP's Democratic Governance Practice Network for practical experiences from other countries. Within five working days, responses were received from 13 countries, and an advisory package that included basic information on how to form and manage coalitions, examples of six countries with a long history of coalitions, and some case studies of what works and what does not, was presented to the Mongolian party leaders.

After many ups and downs and several rounds of negotiations there was a general decision by the major parties to form a grand coalition of National Unity. UNDP, drawing on its knowledge networks, and operating as a neutral facilitator, successfully supported this process.

"The materials and advice UNDP provided were highly appreciated by both parties and helped break the deadlock," says Pratibha Mehta, UNDP Resident Representative in Mongolia.

To Geoff Parcell, who heads BP's knowledge management team, UNDP's knowledge network is an example of how a network should run. Sharing experiences and ideas across countries is, he says, "essentially about connecting people. Look at how UNDP runs its global networks and communities."

"UNDP has a powerful network." In the second edition of *Learning to Fly*, published this October, Mr. Parcell and Chris Collison cite UNDP's networks and communities as a good example of how to create, shape and realize value from knowledge.



"UNDP has set up a very powerful process which goes beyond anything I have seen elsewhere both in public and private sectors."

Mr. Parcell is convinced that UNDP's networks and communities have already improved its effectiveness and speed. "The networks provide a greater breadth of experience and a rapid collection process which would otherwise take months. Learning from others' experience and considering more options based on what others have already tried will continuously improve the quality of what you deliver to clients." ■

—By Pasi Rajala, a communications specialist for UNDP's Operations Support Group based in New York.

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Tracking Debate on UNDP's Report on Democracy in Latin America

Released in April, UNDP's report on the state of democracy in Latin America set off major debates in the region. The report, a landmark, found that after decades of progress and setbacks, democracy is now the norm throughout Latin America. And despite the fact that democracy is more firmly entrenched in some countries than in others, we are poised on the brink of the most extensive, far-reaching, and sustained progress in freedoms for its citizens since Latin American countries gained independence.

But at the same time, Latin American democracies are functioning in societies that are both poor and unequal. Democracy, poverty and inequality represent three key elements that characterize each Latin American country and Latin America as a whole.

Dante Caputo addressing a launch of the report *Democracy in Latin America* which has prompted considerable high level discussions on the future of democracy in the region.

Since it's release in Lima, Peru, the report's impact has been considerable. It has been praised by the Presidents of Bolivia and Colombia, and governments have participated at particularly high levels during presentations of the report in Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Mexico. Hundreds of newspaper articles, TV and radio interviews have followed up on the report and a special Web site for the report has helped to fuel the debate in and outside Latin America.

The report is aimed at reorienting the debate on democracy and the State, politics, markets and globalization. Although the final results will only be seen years from now, clearly it is having an effect on the region, even now.

According to the report, the region has experienced intense political and economic upheavals over the last 25 years. On one hand, we have witnessed political change as well as economic reforms, and on the other hand, we have felt the effects of pro-market economics. The effects of these transformations have been unevenly distributed.

On the "credit side of the ledger" we must tally the facts that in Latin America today there is an acceptance of universal suffrage and elections that are relatively free, clean and regular. Moreover, from a political point of view, free markets are favoured by a large majority of the region's citizens.

However, on the "debit side of the ledger," one notes that, while human rights violations have gone down, progress in this area has not kept pace with the spread of democracy throughout the region. But even more critically, in the area of democracy's impact on social rights, *per capita* GDP has stagnated. In 1980, per capita GDP had reached US$3,734; 22 years later, this stood at $3,792 (both in 1995 dollars), an insignificant advance.

Even more worrisome is the very high level of poverty, with poor people accounting for 42.9 percent of the region's 18 countries in 2002. Inequality is extremely high and the employment situation has deteriorated. The number of unemployed and unregistered workers without medical coverage or retirement benefits increased significantly meaning that the social safety net for a growing number of workers decreased.

The report's finding concerning the lack of trust in democracy's most important institutions, such as political parties, is serious and alarming. In 2002, the aggregate index of support for democracy for the region was 2.03. Consistent democrats account for only 43 percent of the citizenry, the least for any region of the world. And while the pivotal role of political parties is perceived to be an intrinsic part of the democratic process, citizens call into question both the way parties work as well as their leaders.

Lastly, there is a clearly expressed concern about the influence of *de facto* powers—such as by people who are not elected. Throughout Latin America we encounter the perception that leading businessmen, the financial sector, the mass media and multilateral credit institutions wield the real power throughout the region.

The region appears to have overcome the period of institutional collapse and the military coups which dragged on for a good part of the past century. However, making the complacent assumption that democracy is safe and sound is a recipe for disaster. If democracy is forced to coexist alongside widespread poverty, extreme inequality, weak governments and institutions, economies which expel workers and destroy factories and single-option dogmatic economic thinking, there is a danger that democracy will simply degenerate into simple electioneering.

It is important to ensure that the political agenda can be receptive to needed democratic reforms. It is vital to foster debate about how to move toward a system whose subjects are *citizens with rights*; toward a State whose effects are felt uniformly throughout its territory, and whose principal objective is to safeguard and expand a citizen-oriented democracy; to overcome the crisis of confidence in elected officials and widespread distrust and ultimately embrace politics that can express shared perceptions and collective undertakings that are capable of inspiring participation; to get away from a dogmatic conception of the market economy and instead to adopt a view that allows for economic policy diversity and is a topic upon which citizens can express themselves, deliberate and reach decisions.

It is necessary to harness our imagination, creativity, knowledge and politics as we shoulder the social and historical responsibility of negotiating the transition from the system of electoral democracy that we have today, and making the changeover to the citizen-based democracy that is our sincerest aspiration. ■

—Dante Caputo is the former Argentine Foreign Minister and Director of UNDP's Project on Democratic Development in Latin America.

Jonah Sutherland/UNDP

Pham Thi Thanh Nhung says youth need a nudge toward activism.

Ali Salman
"Does the intensity of our efforts here have a heat wave effect?"

Roberta Pamela Ona Sionesini
"Let us use this opportunity to establish a clear sense of direction."

Sudyumna Dahal
"What are some concrete plans that we can take back home?"

Luciana Guimaraes
"Every 13 minutes, one Brazilian is murdered in my country."

Asian Youth Leaders Pledge Best Efforts for Change

HIROSHIMA, JAPAN

Put a group of passionate and determined 18-to-30-year-old leaders together for three days and you're guaranteed no shortage of interesting dialogue.

Not only dialogue, but at the Pan-Asian Youth Leadership Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, ideas for action. From people like Pham Thi Thanh Nhung, a 22-year-old green activist from Viet Nam, or Luciana Guimaraes, a gun control activist from Sao Paulo, Brazil, or from Sachin Pilot, 26, the youngest member of the Indian Parliament.

The topics bandied about and deliberated during the Pan-Asian Summit, which ranged from poverty reduction to HIV/AIDS to environmental protection characterized the spirited nature of the conference, which brought more than 100 young government leaders, entrepreneurs, activists and academics from all over Asia and the Pacific to discuss ways to move forward on the Millennium Development Goals.

Ms. Guimaraes went to Hiroshima to promote peace building efforts through her non-governmental organization, the Sou da Paz Institute which is working to reduce the infestation of urban violence, prevent crime and mobilize gun control measures.

"Every 13 minutes, one Brazilian is murdered in my country," Ms. Guimaraes said. "Brazil also has the highest rate of death by firearms. I was inspired to do something after learning about this seven years ago."

Mr. Pilot said the Summit was an opportunity to expand his personal mission to fight for the rights of people in rural areas with peers from around the world. "I take back from this Summit a renewed sense of commitment to work towards meeting the MDGs. It will be my endeavour as a young parliamentarian to push forward the agendas of the MDGs in my party and the government."

The MDGs, adopted by UN Member States four years ago, are comprised of eight targets that aim to slash poverty rates, protect natural resources and halt the spread of AIDS by 2015. The delegates in Hiroshima pledged, as Millennium Campaign Youth Advocates, to do whatever it takes to encourage their communities to reduce poverty and establish a permanent network of young leaders in their region to shape a common agenda.

"Let us use this opportunity to establish a clear sense of direction," said Roberta Pamela Ona Sionesini, a delegate from the South Pacific island of Niue. "Let us not say 'We should do this, we should do that.' Let us walk the talk."

Still, it's a tall order. Even for the most ambitious, executing these strategies is a daunting task—a concern voiced by many of the participants.

"Because the goals are so intangible, it can be very self-serving to go back afterward and expect that you're going to change the world," said Nandita Das of India, an actress, TV personality and social issues activist. "It's not realistic."

Ali Salman of Pakistan offered three criteria for a successful summit, which he called a "Nuclear Model of Development." He used the devastation Hiroshima suffered after the atomic bomb as a positive metaphor for the conference. "Does the intensity of our efforts here have a heat wave effect?" he asked. "Does it have blasting effect? Does the sustainability have a radiation effect?" ■

—Sonia Krishnan is a reporter for The Seattle Times.

NGO'S MULTIMEDIA MESSAGE DESIGNED AS FUN, HIP AND COOL

HIROSHIMA, JAPAN

Click play, and it begins like this: "We take our world for granted—the air we breathe, the water we drink ... our future."

But the rather conventional monotone message gets some attitude as British star Pierce Brosnan comes on in the video clip and says, "You don't have to be James Bond to save the world." Then a fashionably dressed young host, Nadia, takes one through the programme while a fast-paced series of nature images flashes and earth-theme hip-hop plays in the background.

This bite of the "Eco 4 the World" multi-media programme produced with a tinge of MTV-like hipness quotient illustrates the kind of trend catching on in the world of eco-advocacy. More and more youth NGOs are embracing the so-called "edutainment" as a way to spread the message of environmental justice to a wider segment of the population.

"Mixing education and entertainment—it's a no-brainer," said Eric Quinciey, an Indonesia-based spokesman for the team of international entrepreneurs who created Eco 4 the World for Big Durian Productions, with funding from UNDP, to promote the MDGs. ■

—By Eiji Yamashita, a reporter for The Hanford Sentinel *in the San Joaquin Valley, California.*

MATTERS OF FACT

Returning ex-combatants, including child soldiers, in Liberia, waiting to register in a programme that will allow them to exchange their guns and learn job skills.

Fifty-seven major **armed conflicts**, waged between 1990 and 2001, killed as many as 3.6 million people and civilians accounted for more than 90 percent of the casualties. Most conflicts are internal civil wars. **Human development** is likely to be lower in areas that suffer from conflict. Almost 50 percent of the **lowest-ranking countries** listed on the UNDP 2002 Human Development Index have been severely affected by armed conflict. According to at least one study, a poor country is 85 times more likely to experience violent conflict than a rich one. While many conflicts develop along cultural lines, cultural differences are rarely the cause of conflict—**inequality and greed** are often the key factors. World **military spending** increased by about 11 percent in real terms to US$956 billion in 2003. The cost of UN **peacekeeping operations** is now about $2.8 billion a year. There were 58,741 military personnel and civilian police serving in UN peacekeeping operations on 31 July 2004. **Landmines**, the explosive remnants of war, are still present in at least 60 countries. There are about 300,000 **child soldiers** in the world.

Sources: *Human Development Report 2004; SIPRI Yearbook 2004; Small Arms Survey, 2003, 2004*

United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017
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